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ABSTRACT

During the 1980s, the population of black women aged 16 years and older in the United States increased by 17.2%, and labor force participation for black women increased by 29%. In 1987, black women accounted for 50% of total black employment. The unemployment rate for black teenagers in 1990 was 30% (versus 10.8% for all black women). Labor force participation by black women increased from 53.1% in 1980 to 57.8% in 1990. Predictably, black women with more years of schooling have higher labor force participation rates. Increasing numbers of black women are entering higher paying and career-oriented managerial and professional specialty occupations, and many black women are becoming entrepreneurs. Total earnings for black women who worked 50 weeks or more in 1989 averaged $17,389 (up 63% from 1980). Between 1980 and 1990, the number of black families maintained by women rose 34.3%. Since 1980, families headed by black females have experienced a 54.9% increase in income. By 1987, there were 21,000 more black women in the work force than black men. This trend should continue through the end of this century. (MN)

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Facts on Working Women

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BLACK WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE

During the decade of the 1980's, the population of black women 16 years of age and over in the United States grew from 9.9 million to 11.6 million--a 17.2 percent increase. The largest portion of this increase was in the 25 to 34 age group--from 1.5 million in 1980 to 2.2 million in 1989. Black female teenagers experienced a population decline throughout the decade of the eighties from 1,180,000 in 1980 to 1,100,000 in 1989. By the end of 1990, this total dropped to 1,085,000--their lowest population figure since the 1972 figure of 1,040,000.

Labor force participation has risen dramatically for black women during the past decade--a 29 percent increase since 1980 (an average annual increase of 154,000). Historically, black women in the United States have continually had higher participation rates than white women or women of Hispanic origin. The disparity between their rates, however, is constantly dwindling. Projections done by the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the year 2000 show that by that year, white women's participation rate will surpass that of black women as the highest--62.9 percent and 62.5 percent, respectively.

EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

One of the most impressive gains made by black women in the past 11 years has been their employment growth. Between 1980 and 1990, 1.5 million black women have found work. In 1980 they represented 48 percent of total black employment. By 1987 they accounted for a record 50 percent and have represented the major segment of black employment in every year since.

As is the case for all women, unemployment for black women tends to lessen with age. Only those 45 to 64 years old had unemployment rates equal to or lower than the 1990 annual average for all women (5.4 percent). In 1990 the annual unemployment rate of black women 25 to 34 years old was 11.9 percent--more than twice that of black women 45 to 54 years old and three times higher than those 55 to 64 years old. A steady decline in the unemployment rate for all black women followed the recession that started in July 1981 and ended in November 1982--from 18.6 percent in 1983 to 10.8 percent in 1990.

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Unemployment among black teenage women has been at record highs throughout the past decade. During the recession years of the early 1980's, their unemployment rate soared to 48.2 percent in 1983. Since that time, their unemployment rate has declined to 30.0 percent in 1990.

There were nearly 5 million black women of working age (16 years and over) who were not labor force participants in 1990--2.7 million were engaged in own home housework; 722,000 were going to school, 396,000 were unable to work because of long-term physical or mental illness or retirement, and 1.1 million had various other reasons for not working, such as, being too old, voluntarily idle, being a seasonal worker, or not looking for a job because they believed that no jobs were available for which they could qualify.

Black women have improved their employment status since 1980: Labor force participation rose from 53.1 percent to 57.8 percent in 1990; there were 1.5 million more employed black women in 1990 than in 1980; unemployment has dropped from 14.0 percent to 10.8 percent; and the number of black women not in the labor force began to stabilize.

Table 1
Employment Status of the Civilian Noninstitutional Population of Black Women, Selected Years
(numbers in thousands)

Year	Civilian Noninstitutional Population	In Labor Force	Percent of Population	Employed	Unemployed Number	Unemployed Percent	Not In Labor Force
1980	9,880	5,253	53.1	4,515	738	14.0	4,627
1981	10,102	5,401	53.5	4,561	840	15.6	4,701
1982	10,300	5,527	53.7	4,552	975	17.6	4,773
1983	10,477	5,681	54.2	4,622	1,059	18.6	4,796
1984	10,694	5,907	55.2	4,995	911	15.4	4,787
1985	10,873	6,144	56.5	5,231	913	14.9	4,729
1986	11,033	6,281	56.9	5,386	894	14.2	4,752
1987	11,224	6,507	58.0	5,648	858	13.2	4,717
1988	11,402	6,609	58.0	5,834	776	11.7	4,793
1989	11,582	6,796	58.7	6,025	772	11.4	4,786
1990	11,733	6,785	57.8	6,051	734	10.8	4,948

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings, January 1990 and 1991* and the *Handbook of Labor Statistics, August 1989.*

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Education plays an important role in the labor force participation of black women. Predictably, the more years of schooling, the higher the labor force participation rate. Black women with 8 years or less of schooling participated at a rate of only 22.2 percent. However, for those who completed high school, the rate tripled to 67.5 percent. After 4 or more years of college, it soared to 83.4 percent. Those who have reached this level participate more readily than similarly educated white women. Black women with only 4 years of high school participated more readily than white women with 1 to 3 years of college--67.5 percent to 66.4 percent, respectively.

Employment statistics demonstrate that black women who complete high school tend to avoid the undesirable consequences associated with dropping out of school. High school dropouts are those persons identified as completing 1 to 3 years of high school. They experience higher unemployment, earn much lower wages, and have longer periods of joblessness than those who complete high school or college. These economic consequences will usually persist throughout a dropout's working life. Of the 11.4 million women between the ages of 25 and 64 who lacked a high school diploma in March 1987, 18.7 percent or 2.1 million were black. As of March 1988, four out of five employed black women had completed at least 4 years of high school.

Since 1983 the median years of schooling for black women in the labor force has been 12.6 years. The median age for employed black women who did not complete high school ranged from 53 years for those with less than 5 years of schooling to 39 years for those with 1 to 3 years of high school. For employed black women who were high school graduates or who had completed 4 or more years of college, their median ages were 34.5 years and 36.9 years, respectively.

Table 2
Total Employment of Black Women 16 Years Old and Over,
By Age and Years of School Completed, March 1988
(numbers in thousands)

Age	Total	8 Years or Less of School	1 to 3 Years of High School	4 Years of High School	1 to 3 Years of College	4 or More Years of College
16 years and over	5,682	325	810	2,453	1,222	873
16 to 19	249	8	109	107	27	0
20 to 24	683	13	57	307	247	60
25 to 34	1,807	29	152	856	450	320
35 to 44	1,437	52	180	608	302	295
45 to 54	913	72	183	388	127	142
55 to 64	489	104	108	158	59	60
65 and over	107	51	23	16	9	8

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Current Population Survey," March 1988.

OCCUPATIONS

Increasing numbers of black women are entering the higher paying and career-oriented managerial and professional specialty occupations, as well as the more traditional jobs in the technical, sales, and administrative support areas. These two major occupational groups have recorded the highest gains in black female employment in recent years and have accounted for four-fifths of the increase in black female employment from 1986 through 1990. During that short period, employers have added a wide variety of talented black women to their payrolls: 36,000 social workers; 28,000 accountants and auditors; 29,000 investigators and adjusters, except insurance; 23,000 secretaries; 23,000 registered nurses; 16,000 police and detectives; 9,000 administrators, education and related fields; 6,000 lawyers; 6,000 computer systems analysts and scientists; 5,000 real estate sales persons; 3,000 engineers; 3,000 editors and reporters; 3,000 mechanics and repairers; and 3,000 teachers at colleges and universities.

Many black women are exploring the world of business by becoming entrepreneurs. They owned 3.8 percent (102,600) of the 2.7 million women owned sole proprietorships in the United States in 1982. Businesses owned by black women are likely to be in services (53 percent) and retail trade (29 percent).

Black women's employment in some occupations is nearly nonexistent. Historically, women have not been well represented in the skilled trade occupations--mechanics, repairers, construction trade jobs, and precision production occupations. Black women account for only 1 percent (142,000) of the 4 million total persons employed in the skilled trades. When employed, they were likely to be working as electrical and electronic equipment assemblers, butchers and meat cutters, or dressmakers, where they collectively accounted for 54,000 employees in 1990.

Black women have increased their employment in a wide variety of professions. However, there are occupations, some of them well paying, where their employment has declined. From 1986 through 1990, there has been a decline in the number of black women employed in the following occupations: 40,000 fewer typists; 12,000 fewer textile sewing machine operators; 10,000 fewer computer operators; 8,000 fewer secondary school teachers; 3,000 fewer librarians, archivists, and curators; 3,000 fewer bus drivers and 3,000 fewer duplicating, mailing, and office machine operators. The decline in the number of typists and duplicators, mailers, and operators of other office machines reflects the use of more *high tech* office equipment throughout the Nation. According to projections made by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, these are occupational groups that will decline throughout the 1990's.

During the past decade, retail sales workers, nursing aides, secretaries, cashiers, cooks, elementary school teachers, janitors and cleaners (private households and buildings) have been the largest sources of employment for black women--accounting for as much as 33 percent of total black female employment in 1990. Excluding elementary school teachers, these occupations offer low pay, require little training and few skills, demand little work experience, and offer very limited chances for advancement. Even though some of these occupations will be among the fastest growing in the near future, many are part-time positions which deny workers and their families the benefits of health insurance and a secure retirement income.

EARNINGS

Total money earnings (median earnings) for black women who worked 50 weeks or more in 1989 was $17,389--a 63 percent increase from the 1980 figure of $10,672. When adjusted for price change, their earnings were somewhat ahead of the rise in prices.

The most lucrative occupations for women in 1990 were: lawyers; physicians; engineers; computer systems analysts and scientists; teachers at colleges and universities; managers in marketing, advertising, and public relations; natural scientists; and registered nurses. Median weekly earnings for women working full time in these jobs ranged from approximately $608 to $875 in 1990. Only 2.5 percent of total persons (female and male) employed in these occupations were black women and only 6.6 percent of all women employed in these jobs were black women.

Table 3
Total Money Earnings of Black Women
Year-Round, Full-Time Workers,
1980 through 1989

Year	Median Earnings	In 1989 Dollars
1980	$10,672	$16,050
1981	11,199	15,277
1982	12,132	15,589
1983	12,690	15,799
1984	13,720	16,374
1985	14,308	16,489
1986	14,734	16,670
1987	16,002	17,467
1988	16,538	17,335
1989	17,389	17,389

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census,
"*Money Income of Households, Families, and Persons in the United States: 1980-1986 and Money Income and Poverty Status in the United States: 1988-1989.*

FAMILIES, MARITAL STATUS, AND LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Between 1980 and 1990, the number of black families increased from 6.4 million to 7.4 million. There was a substantial increase in the number of families maintained by black women (34.3 percent, from 2.5 million to 3.4 million) and in those maintained by black men (36.8 percent, from 364,000 to 498,000). The largest group of black families--married couples--experienced only a 0.7 percent increase over that same period from 3.5 million to 3.6 million. This diversification of family types is not a trend exclusive to black families--it transcends racial lines and spans the Nation. White and Hispanic origin families followed the same basic pattern as black families, except they experienced more substantial increases in married-couple families--5.1 percent for white, married-couple families and 43.9 percent for Hispanic, married-couple families.

There have been many changes affecting family structure in recent years, regardless of race or ethnicity. Some examples are increases in the divorce rates and in marital separations; the increase in the number of women who have decided to have children without getting married; and the increase among women deciding to have their first child at later ages.

Even though one-third (3.7 million) of the black female population aged 16 years and over are in married-couple families, their marriages last fewer years than that of their counterparts. For a variety of reasons--divorce, death of a spouse, or separation--black women, on average, spend only 16 years of their expected lifetime of 74 years with a husband. Data from the National Center for Health Statistics show that black and white women generally experience their first marriage at nearly the same age--24 years and 23 years, respectively. However, black women are less likely than other women to remarry.

According to 1989 data from the Bureau of the Census, black families with the husband and wife as labor force participants had a median income ($37,787) higher than married couple families with the wife not in the labor force ($18,727). Black male headed households, no wife present, had a median income of $18,395, while black female headed households, no husband present, had a median income of $11,630.

Table 4
Black Families, by Type,
Selected Years
(numbers in thousands)

Family Type	1980	1983	1986	1990
Total Families	6,385	6,802	6,908	7,405
Married couple families	3,520	3,645	3,513	3,546
Families maintained by women	2,501	2,780	2,961	3,360
Families maintained by men	364	378	399	498

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment and Earnings, January 1981, 1984, 1987, and 1991.

Historically, most married black women have worked outside the home. Their strong attachment to the labor force is shown by the number of women employed full time (2.3 million), and the high labor force participation rate (64.7 percent) when compared with other black women. Data from the March 1990 Current Population Survey reveal that their unemployment rate declined to 5.7 percent in 1989 from 11.0 percent in 1975. Also, sixty-one percent were employed and nearly 9 out of 10 who were employed were full-time workers.

As a growing segment of women who maintain families, married black women with absent spouses numbered slightly more than 1 million in March 1990. Even though labor force participation is up to 64.4 percent, unemployment continues to be a serious problem for these women, reaching 11.7 percent in March 1990. Only single, never married black women, had a higher unemployment rate--16.2 percent.

The number of widowed and divorced black women increased 29 percent since 1980--from 2.1 million to 2.7 million in 1989. Widows (1.4 million) had the lowest labor force participation rate (24.6 percent) of all marital groups. The majority of widows were of retirement age--65 years and over.

Divorced black women participate readily in the labor force. With nearly 3 out of 4 working or looking for work, they have the highest participation rate among all black women. Divorcees with children under age 18 are even more likely to participate in the labor force. Eight of every 10 are working or seeking employment. They are more likely to be working than any other black women who maintain families with children, including those women who are married with absent spouses, those who are widowed, and those who have never married. Most black divorcees are between the ages of 35 to 54 with a median age of 43 years.

Young, single black women have the greatest difficulty obtaining a foothold in the labor force, but with increased school and skills training, they find more secure niches for themselves. This fact is demonstrated in the low percentage of employed single black women when compared with other marital groups, excluding widows. Only 48 percent of single black women were working in March 1990--divorcees, 68.2 percent; married, spouse present, 60.9 percent; and married, spouse absent, 56.8 percent.

FAMILY INCOME AND POVERTY

The median income of black families has risen substantially since 1980. Married couple families have seen their median income increase by 56.2 percent; 54.9 percent for female householders, no husband present; and 50.9 percent for married couple families with the wife in the paid labor force. In 1988, for the first time, the median income for black married couple families surpassed $30,000. The median income of all black families continued to lag behind that of all white families by more than $15,000 in 1989 ($20,209 vs. $35,975).

Table 5
Median Income of Black Families, Selected Years

Type of Family	1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1989
Total Families	$12,674	$14,506	$15,432	$17,604	$19,329	$20,209
Married couple family	19,624	21,840	23,418	26,583	30,385	30,650
Wife in paid labor force	25,040	26,389	28,775	31,949	36,709	37,787
Male householder, no wife present	14,489	15,552	15,724	18,731	17,853	18,395
Female householder, no husband present	7,506	7,999	8,648	9,300	10,657	11,630

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Money Income and Poverty Status in the United States: 1981, 1983, 1984, 1986, and 1989 (Advance Reports).*

Blacks represented 11 percent of the civilian noninstitutional population and 11 percent of all families in the United States in 1990. However, they comprised a disproportionate share of poor families (30 percent)--with a poverty rate of 27.8 percent. Black families with female householders accounted for nearly one-fourth of all poor families and nearly three-fourths of all poor black families.

The number of black married-couple families below the poverty level with children under age 18 was 291,000 in 1989. The corresponding figure for female householders with no husband present was 1.4 million and for male householders with no wife present, 77,000. In two-thirds of black married-couple families, the wife is in the paid labor force and she contributes substantially to family income--her contribution to a median family income of $37,787 was $19,060. Not having a second major income is one reason why poor black female-maintained families greatly outnumber poor black married-couple families. In 1989 only 443,000 black married-couple families were poor compared with 1.5 million female-maintained families.

Poverty is the major problem facing families maintained by women. Of the 3.3 million black families maintained by women in 1989, 46.3 percent were poor. Even though most women who maintain families are employed (56.8 percent), they rarely earn enough to raise their family income above the poverty level.

In 1989 black children under age 18 represented nearly half of the black population that is poor--4.4 million out of 9.3 million persons. The poverty rate for black children was 43.7 percent. Some 5.3 million black families with children under age 18 were poor.

OUTLOOK FOR THE YEAR 2000

In 1980 there were 328,000 fewer black women in the labor force than black men. By the end of 1987, black women surpassed black men in the labor force by a margin of 21,000. This trend should continue through the end of this century with black women being the largest minority group in the labor force.

The labor force is expected to become increasingly minority and female by 2000. Women, in general, will account for nearly two-thirds of net labor force growth from 1988 through 2000, while black women will account for 9 percent.

Eighteen million new jobs are expected to be added to the economy by the turn of the century. Many of these jobs will require some education beyond high school, higher levels of language, math, and reasoning skills. Even though these occupational changes will present a difficult challenge for many disadvantaged black women who are overrepresented in slow growing or declining occupations, black women have already surpassed their male counterparts in attendance at colleges and universities and in occupations requiring advanced degrees. Black women should continue to prepare themselves for the future job market by seeking out the necessary training and education demanded by the changing work environment.

Four out of five unemployed black women have completed only 4 years or less of high school. Since 97 percent of the black women who have 4 or more years of college are employed, clearly post secondary education and training paid dividends to those who were able to make this human capital investment.

One proven way to elevate the economic status of black women is through continued education and skills training. By the year 2000, employment opportunities will be found in nearly all occupational groups. Workers with the most education and training will find themselves in great demand and being offered higher paying jobs.

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